

Approved For Release 1999/09/07 : CIA-RDP75-00001R000200220012-9

0200220012-9

Komer, No. 2 Man Of the Other War U.S. Fights in Viet

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By PATRICK J. KILLEN

One senior government off-

tionary development, Nguyen
Duc Thang, and the minister
of economy, Nguyen Hy Hanh.

ADVISERS ONLY

ROBERT KOMER

WASHINGTON, April 8 (UPI) — President Johnson's new field commander for "the other war" in South Viet Nam has the job of bringing peace and political stability to the countryside.

Robert W. Komer, one of the new top-level ambassadorial team taking over in late April, believes that civil unification programs already are "crunching forward" and gradually gaining speed.

He said: "There is no doubt whatsoever that I am optimistic about the increasing momentum we are achieving on the civil side, even pacification. I am also optimistic over the progress achieved in the military sphere and in the political evolution toward representative government."

FAMILIAR WITH AIMS

Komer will be working with Ellsworth Bunker, new ambassador to Saigon, and Eugene Murphy Locke, ambassador to Pakistan who has been named Bunker's deputy.

As a presidential aide since Kennedy days, and Washington overseer of "the other war" for a year, he already is familiar with what the administration has been trying to accomplish.

Komer's appointment as replacement for popular deputy ambassador William J. Porter drew fire from part of the Saigon press corps and some unnamed but widely quoted officials who spoke of resigning.

Komer has been described as abrasive, overly optimistic and full of meaningless statistics. Some said he was President Johnson's "blowtorch" and had urged Americans and Vietnamese alike on seven trips to Viet Nam.

DESCRIBED AS TOUGH

Whatever he might be, Komer is an official of 45 years whose background includes the Harvard Business School and the Central Intelligence Agency. He operates with assurance, exuberance and fast energy.

can call him "a tough, hard-nosed character who asks a lot of direct questions."

Although Porter currently holds both the jobs Komer and Locke have been appointed to, there is no dispute here as to jurisdiction. Locke, a Texas lawyer turned diplomat, was named by the President to be Bunker's No. 2 man and that is where the matter stands, uncontested.

Komer, who has been directing Washington aspects of what Johnson calls "the other war" since March 1966, spoke of the close collaboration he has had with Porter, and described as "utterly false" any impression he was replacing the deputy ambassador because of slow progress.

HIGHEST PRAISE

"Bill Porter is leaving Saigon for a new and high post (as yet unannounced)," Komer said. "He is doing so with the highest praise from all concerned."

Komer said he anticipated no drastic changes in the civil programs or personnel. "I am unaware of a single resignation," he said. Normal rotation will make some difference, he said, "but I would hope most of the top people would stay on."

Komer said his relations with the Vietnamese government were "the very best." He specially values his close ties with the minister of revolution-

"The other war," Komer said, "including pacification, must remain primarily Vietnamese in character. The U.S. can provide support and technical advice but the program is entirely Vietnamese. I've always, as has Bill Porter, been in full recognition that we are there as advisers and not as principals."

Does he consider himself an overly optimistic, statistic-dropping blowtorch?

"The job the President assigned me last March was to supervise and expedite from the Washington end. While I believe sobriquets like blowtorch rather overstate the amount of heat I've generated, a certain amount of heat is essential to getting a wartime job done. I hope the heat has generated a certain amount of light as well.

"I feel that one can only properly assess developments in South Viet Nam if one looks at the situation across the board."

SEES IMPROVEMENT

"I believe that things are going much better in the south than they were at the time of my first visit in April, 1966, and that the President and the public should know what I really think.

"On the other hand, 'I've never pulled any punches in my reports to the President.

"As to statistics, anyone can go to one hamlet or one district or one province or even two or three and confirm that in random samples things are not going as well as embassy Saigon or Mac-V (military assistance command-Viet Nam) or someone in Washington like myself says. But my job is to assess how things are going in all 44 provinces.

"While I am as leery of statistical puffing as any one, I have never yet found a way to assess the average performance across the board without using statistics, nor have I ever used statistics not pro-

vided by our mission or Mac-V."

Komer declined to predict how long the job will take in Viet Nam.

"Other things being equal," Komer said, "pacification would be long and arduous, taking many years. But that does not take into account the impact of military successes against the main force personnel, the progress of political evolution in the south, the effect on Hanoi of the continued bombing, the government of Vietnam's stabilization of the economy and last but not least the growing confidence in the south that the GVN (the government of Viet Nam) is winning.

The psychological impact on the people in the countryside is shown, in my view, by the number of those who braved Viet Cong threats to vote in last September's elections and now in the village and hamlet elections, by the sharp rise in the Chieu Hoi (open-arms defection) program and by the extensive flow of refugees into more secure areas, which is partly a product of the fighting but also reflects the attitude of the people in insecure areas to come where people can protect them.

"The other war," as the President sees it, encompasses all the non-military programs in Viet Nam. It is much more than just pacification. It includes the anti-inflation program, cleaning up the (Saigon) port bottleneck, nation building, post-war economic development and a host of similar things."